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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004675

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SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION SCENE SETTER: YUNLIN, NANTOU AND  
CHANGHUA COUNTIES, A MIXED BAG IN THE TAIWAN HEARTLAND

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D)

1. (U) Summary: Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Kuomintang (KMT) candidates for county magistrate in Yunlin, Nantou, and Changhua counties are engaged in highly competitive races. In Yunlin County, where factions are still influential, both DPP and KMT candidates are energized and hopeful for a win. In Nantou County, a Green-leaning independent candidate has complicated the race while in Changhua County, the KMT candidate, who continues to catch up to the DPP incumbent in the polls, has been accused of corruption by the DPP. The large number of undecided voters in all 3 races will likely bring these counties down to the wire. End Summary.

Yunlin County: Historically Blue, Becoming More Green  
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2. (C) KMT Yunlin County Chairman Cheng Ching-chen told AIT that for the past 50 years, Yunlin has been a KMT stronghold. Originally, he said, the voter base was 65 percent KMT and 35 percent DPP but had shifted in the wake of the last two presidential elections, to 30 percent KMT, 35 percent DPP and 35 percent undecided. Cheng explained that factions are still strong and that the Chang faction, affiliated with the Farmer's Association and led by former County Magistrate Chang Jung-wei, currently in jail on a bribery conviction, is the most influential. The Hsu faction, affiliated with KMT candidate Hsu Shu-po's father, is also influential. Cheng told AIT that the KMT, with more than 30,000 local members, support from both major factions, and a boost from the recent DPP scandals, is confident that Hsu Shu-po can win. Cheng confirmed that KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou has made one appearance in Yunlin and plans to return. Cheng hoped that Ma's visit, along with separate visits by Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng and Lien Chan, will help sway the undecided voters. Cheng described vote buying as part of "our culture" but promised that the KMT will not buy votes even if the DPP decides to.

3. (C) DPP Yunlin County Chairman Wang Kao-hsin agreed that the DPP's support base is smaller than the KMT's. However, Wang described in detail how the DPP won 18 out of 20 townships and villages in the 2004 presidential election. Wang also described his frequent trips around the county, in particular to four townships that have been DPP strongholds for the past 50 years. Due to the party's cultivation of these 4 mini-strongholds, the DPP, Wang told AIT, is growing stronger, and he confidently predicted that DPP candidate Su Chi-feng will win the election. Wang explained that approximately half of Yunlin County's population is composed of farmers and that Su Chi-feng's main campaign plank is to make Yunlin County the farming capital of Taiwan. According to Wang, farmers, concerned only about their daily lives, usually support the DPP, and have not been put off by recent DPP scandals. Wang also told AIT that polling is inaccurate since voters tend to hide their political leanings. Wang insinuated that the DPP's support is larger than the polls indicate, likening the DPP support base to the wind -- "you can't see it but you can feel it."

Nantou County: Differing Eyewitness Accounts  
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4. (C) Hsiung Jun-ping, campaign manager for Nantou County KMT candidate Lee Chao-ching, acknowledged to AIT that Lee, who is currently Nantou City mayor, may not be the most outstanding candidate but that incumbent DPP Magistrate Lin Tsung-nan's dismal performance and the DPP scandals have

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given Lee a boost. Since the majority of Nantou County residents are farmers, Hsiung continued, Lee will focus his platform on agricultural issues. Hsiung stated that during the 2000 presidential election, the Green/Blue support ratio was 2 to 1, but that the ratio has narrowed to 1 to 1. Hsiung confirmed that Ma Ying-jeou visited once and asserted that Ma's charisma has helped Lee gain votes. Hsiung dismissed President Chen's appearances and told AIT that Chen cannot draw large crowds anymore. Hsiung also told AIT that independent candidate Ling Chung-nan, who withdrew from the DPP after failing to win the DPP nomination, will split the

Green vote and help Lee's campaign. Hsiung was confident that the split Green vote and the DPP corruption issues will translate directly into more votes for the KMT. Hsiung estimated a high voter turnout of 70 percent.

15. (C) DPP Nantou County Acting Chairman Chen Yi-ling told AIT that KMT candidate Lee Chao-ching's 8-year term as Mayor of Nantou City has produced no real results and attributed KMT candidate Lee's rise in the polls to independent candidate Lin Ming-chen's withdrawal. Chen accused Lee of vote buying during his second mayoral bid and told AIT that the DPP is concerned that the KMT will buy votes again during this campaign. Lee credited the 3-in-1 election format for boosting voter turnout and predicted the high turnout rate of 70 percent will help the DPP. Chen told AIT that DPP internal polls show DPP candidate Tsai Huang-lang in the lead. Chen asserted that elderly and younger voters prefer the DPP and that most of the swing voters will vote DPP. Chen asserted that the final margin of victory will be under 10,000 votes. Chen confirmed that President Chen Shui-bian visited Nantou twice and will return two more times, arguing that the President's visits have helped Tsai's campaign.

Changhua County: DPP Confident and On the Attack

16. (C) KMT Changhua County Chairman Hsu Fu-ming, told AIT that the current scandal-infested atmosphere is helping the KMT since voters are disappointed in the DPP. According to Hsu, KMT internal polls indicate that its candidate Cho Po-yuan, is in the lead. Hsu asserted that it is premature to predict a winner, however, due to the large number of undecided voters. Although both sides are making accusations, he said, the impact will be minimal; the key to the election will be the candidates' platforms and wooing undecided voters. Hsu told AIT that the Pan-Blue camp has a larger voter base during local, small-scale elections, but said the DPP has an advantage during county magistrate elections. Hsu estimated the voter turnout rate will be between 60 to 70 percent. Hsu described Ma Ying-jeou's frequent visits as a boost to Cho's campaign and confirmed that Ma will visit three more times. The party's island-wide November 27 rally, Hsu said, will directly compete with the DPP's rally scheduled for the same day and could be an important factor in the election.

17. (C) DPP Changhua County Executive Director Chen Yung-fong told AIT that DPP internal polls put DPP candidate and incumbent Magistrate Weng Chin-chu ahead by 10 percentage points. Chen estimated that polling is more accurate in metropolitan areas than in the countryside since voters in the country may disguise their vote in the hopes of selling their vote to the highest bidder. Chen told AIT that since there have not been any new scandals emerging, Weng Chin-chu, a member of the New Tide, has a good chance of winning. However, Chen indicated that the DPP is cautious and confirmed Changhua County will participate in the DPP's island-wide anti-corruption rally on Sunday, November 27. Chen called attention to the KMT's own corruption problems and mentioned Cho Po-yuan's suspected involvement in corrupt procurements for the Taiwan Railway Administration. Chen predicted voter turnout rate will be approximately 60 percent and attributed the past high voter turnout rate to the KMT practice of vote buying. He has not ruled out possible KMT vote buying at the township/village level this time but he assured AIT that the DPP will not participate. Chen told AIT that Weng Chin-chu will focus on bringing swing voters back into the DPP fold.

Paal